

Salt River Fire Department Operating Guidelines

"May-Day" Communications

April 2000

202.03A

1 of 5



Purpose

Recent events surrounding multiple firefighter fatalities while operating at fires should cause the fire service to rethink the approach to managing a rescue effort for a reported trapped or missing firefighter. Actions by the incident commander must be quick, decisive, and correct. The situation allows only a very narrow window of survivability for any missing firefighter(s).

"May-Day" Radio Message

The radio message "May-Day" will be used by firefighters to report their status as being in trouble and needing rescue. Any member may use "May-Day" to report a lost firefighter. Any report of "May-Day" will receive priority radio traffic followed by the emergency traffic tone. The term "May-Day" will be reserved only to report missing or trapped firefighters. The term "emergency traffic" will be used to report all other emergencies.

Command Responsibilities

Command will maintain an awareness of the location of firefighters on the fireground, primarily through assignments and the accountability system. In the event that a firefighter cannot be located through a PAR, or any other time a firefighter is missing, the Captain or any member may announce a "May Day." The term "May Day" will indicate a lost or down firefighter. Command shall respond to a "May Day" by implementing a rescue plan for the firefighter(s).

Missing Firefighter

Company officers and individual firefighters who suspect a firefighter is missing must notify the incident commander immediately. The incident commander **MUST ALWAYS** assume that the missing firefighter is lost in the building until the member is accounted for. The system must include the ability to identify when a firefighter is going to be delayed beyond his/her SCBA air time.

The plan should include:

- Fire operations during rescue operations.
- Expanding organization
- Establishing the rescue sector
- Assign a chief officer to the rescue team
- Medical operations
- Family support branch officer
- Member support--debriefing, etc.
- Logistics--specialized equipment (Resource Management)
- Safety

Salt River Fire Department Operating Guidelines

“May-Day” Communications

April 2000

202.03A

2 of 5



Support activities

Media control-information management

Use of Emergency Traffic Tones to Announce the Report of a Missing Firefighter

All personnel operating at the scene need to be alerted that a firefighter is missing or trapped. The emergency traffic tone followed by a radio update will be utilized.

Change the Strategy and Plan, to a High Priority Rescue Effort

The Incident Commander must re-structure his/her strategy and action plan to include a firefighter rescue effort. This may seem obvious to most. However, Incident Commanders can become overwhelmed by the emotion related to the crisis at hand and may become hooked on reacting to tasks rather than looking at the global picture. This can lead to disorganization and delays that can be fatal to the missing firefighter. A conscious commitment must be made to quickly develop a rescue plan (see above). Accurate information must be quickly obtained and acted upon. A rapid, well thought out plan must be established. Additional resources must be immediately obtained. Rapid commitment of resources must occur. These resources must be organized and controlled. The Command organization must expand. The plan, strategy, and objectives must be quickly communicated to Command staff and sector officers. The plan and rescue activities must be continually monitored and revised as necessary. Conditions and updated information causes changes in the plan and objectives. The Incident Commander must communicate any changes to the Command staff and sector officers.

Immediately Request Additional Alarms or Mutual Aid

In many situations, all resources on-scene may already be committed to firefighting positions. Some firefighters may already be approaching physical exhaustion, or the SCBA's may be nearly empty. Relocating committed forces is difficult and slow. At least one additional alarm (4 engines 2 ladders) should be immediately requested upon a report of a missing or trapped firefighter. Additional multiple alarms may need to be requested based on circumstances and potential. There should be no hesitation in requesting any additional resources.

Include a Medical Component When Requesting Additional Resources

Medical personnel will be needed to treat rescued firefighters. The Incident Commander must ensure that an adequate number of paramedics are responding as well as an adequate number of rescues (ambulances) to transport injured firefighters. The incident commander should understand that the situation is critical, and firefighters sometimes tend to extend their

Salt River Fire Department Operating Guidelines

“May-Day” Communications

April 2000

202.03A

3 of 5



risk taking when searching for a missing firefighter, and additional firefighters may become injured in the process. Adequate medical resources must be readily available and on site.

Utilize a Centralized Staging Area

All additional resources will be sent to a centralized staging area. The Incident Commander should commit resources from staging based on needs at the site. Staging controls resources and ensures that there is a route in and out of the scene, free of congestion, for rescues to transport recovered firefighters.

Commit the Rapid Intervention Team

All significant firefighting operations will have a "standby" rapid intervention crew (RIC) near the scene. This team should be fully outfitted with protective clothing, SCBA, etc., and monitoring all tactical radio traffic. Upon report of a missing firefighter, the Incident Commander has a completely fresh crew (or more than one crew for especially high hazard situations), fully outfitted, available for commitment to an immediate search and rescue of the last known area of the missing firefighter(s). The RIC team, or any fresh crew(s) in staging, must be immediately sent to the rescue area. The commitment of additional crews, however, must be controlled and organized. The significance of the routine use of RIC teams to firefighter survivability on the fireground is substantial. National Fire Protection Association studies reveal that a majority of firefighters are killed while operating on the fireground at residential fires. To combat this risk we will automatically dispatch an additional engine company to the scene upon the report of a working structural fire. Once the fire is declared "under control", the Incident Commander has the option to cancel the company's response, utilize the company as a fresh crew for heat relief, or to conduct overhaul if needed. At multiple alarms, one or more companies will be assigned this standby function and given the designation "Rescue Sector".

Withdraw Companies from the Affected Area, if Appropriate, to obtain a Roll Call and Reconnaissance Information.

In some situations, such as collapse or explosion, crewmembers can get separated. The only practical method, to obtain an accurate PAR of affected crews, may be to withdraw them to the exterior. In addition, withdrawal may be the only way to quickly obtain accurate information and reconnaissance on exactly where trapped members may be, routing to victims, debris locations, and the type of rescue equipment needed. Once the roll call and reconnaissance information is quickly obtained, crews can be re-assembled into a more organized rescue effort.

Withdrawal is a judgment call based on circumstances at the time, information available, and resources. It may not be practical or possible to do. However, the absolute need for an accurate roll call and information on missing firefighters remains a critical priority. If it's

Salt River Fire Department Operating Guidelines

“May-Day” Communications

April 2000

202.03A

4 of 5



determined not to withdraw, a detailed roll call must be obtained from each sector for all crews operating under his/her direction.

Do not Abandon Firefighting Positions--Hold Positions and Prevent Fire Spread

The reasons for a standby rapid intervention rescue crew(s), and the immediate request for additional resources, becomes very clear with this critical fireground need. If a missing firefighter(s) is to survive, the Incident Commander must keep the fire out of the rescue area. Without standby rescue teams, the Incident Commander is in a fatal catch 22 dilemma. Does he/she relocate companies committed to fire combat to the rescue effort and allow the fire to spread? Or does he hold the fire positions and wait for additional resources for the rescue effort? With a RIC team in place, the incident commander can initiate an immediate rescue effort without withdrawing or relocating fire combat companies.

In most situations the Incident Commander cannot allow the fire to spread. If anything, these fire combat positions need to be reinforced. Additional companies from the multiple alarms or mutual aid should be sent to priority positions to keep the fire out of the rescue area. Large caliber handlines and master appliances should be employed. Adequate water supply must be obtained for this reinforced response.

Assign a Chief Officer to the Rescue Sector

The Incident Commander is faced with a time critical crisis. Correct decisions and strong management of rescue operations is essential. A Chief Officer must be assigned to direct the rescue sector and rescue operations. Depending on the size of the rescue area and the complexity of operations, more than one Chief Officer may be needed to fill additional support positions or sectors.

Assign a Safety Officer to the Rescue Operation

Rescue operations are high risk. The operation may be taking place in a post-collapse environment. Flashover may have occurred. Firefighters will tend to want to freelance and take chances that they would not normally take if it were not for fellow firefighters that are missing. The incident commander, sector officers and company officers must avoid additional injuries. Each additional injury requires a resource commitment that will draw away from the priority rescue effort. A safety sector in the affected area will help control the risk taking. The officer will be able to conduct an assessment of the hazards allowing time for the rescue sector officer to concentrate on the critical rescue effort. These sector officers must work hand in hand to insure that a safe and effective rescue operation is conducted.

Salt River Fire Department Operating Guidelines

"May-Day" Communications

April 2000

202.03A

5 of 5



Individual Responsibilities:

1. Follow directions from supervisors
2. Continue with assignment unless otherwise directed
3. Keep your cool
4. Every captain and chief on the scene should listen specifically for a "May-Day" as fireground noise could cover a call for the "May-Day".

Dispatch Center Responsibilities

When a firefighter is declared lost or missing the Dispatch Center will sound emergency traffic tones (5-10 seconds) on ALL tactical channels being used on the fireground; personnel will be advised that a "May-Day" exists for a missing or trapped firefighter.

Command must be advised to immediately assign someone to monitor Fireground channels in the event the missing firefighter broadcasts on either channel. The Dispatch Center must have the capability to monitor these channels; it is essential that someone monitor the rescue channel.

Dispatch Center will be suspended and ALL channels will be monitored very closely for any transmissions from the missing firefighter.

If the missing firefighter comes up on a channel other than one of the tactical channels, the dispatcher will maintain communications with him/her on that channel and relay information to Command. It is essential that once communications have been established they not be lost.

Once the firefighter has been recovered, or at the conclusion of the incident, all personnel and outside agencies will be notified that the Dispatch Center is back to normal operating conditions.